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Alaska Air National Guard rescues four distressed hikers at Crow Pass

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — The Alaska Air National Guard rescued four distressed hikers from Crow Pass Trail, which runs between Girdwood and the Eagle River Nature Center, July 20.

The hikers had reached approximately the halfway point and were substantially low on food. They didn't have enough for the journey back or to continue forward. Additionally, one of the hikers was experiencing arthritic knee and ankle pain, causing him to become increasingly concerned.

The situation was reported by two other hikers along the trail who used an inReach satellite communication device to send the GPS location to the Alaska State Troopers. After receiving the distress call, the Troopers requested assistance from the Alaska Rescue Coordination Center, asking for the Air National Guard's help with the mission.

The AK RCC coordinated the departure of two pararescuemen of the 212th Rescue Squadron aboard an HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopter of the 210th RQS. The aircraft departed JBER shortly after the mission notification, and the hikers at Crow Pass were quickly located.

"They had made a makeshift S.O.S. symbol out of some branches," said Senior Master Sgt. Brandon Stuemke, the Team Lead pararescueman on the mission. "They broke them all off, and in a clear area where there was contrast of dark soil and the green branches, they made the S.O.S."

The helicopter landed in the clearing to evacuate the hikers, who were picked up, transported and released at Alaska Regional Hospital.

Approximately two hours after the leaving base, the Guardsmen returned and the mission was closed.

"In case you go someplace and you get distressed, this is Alaska, and you have to be prepared with a little bit of extra food, water, basic first aid stuff," said Stuemke, "because rescue doesn't get there immediately and it could take a substantial amount of time, especially with poor weather conditions."

Stuemke said the low clouds and light rain during this mission were manageable for the seasoned Alaska Air Guardsmen, but in worse conditions it may have taken longer to locate the individuals, emphasizing his recommendation for ample preparation and gear.

He also recommends having a solid trip plan and return date that is shared with a friend or family member, and a way to contact help if needed, such as an inReach device.

“The land is remote anywhere you step off the trailhead here in the state, so you need to be prepared to take care of yourself while waiting for help,” he said.

The AK RCC, 210th RQS and 212th RQS were each awarded four saves for this mission.

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PHOTOS

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **DVIDS link** includes video and full story. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/374317/alaska-air-national-guard-rescues-four-distressed-hikers-crow-pass>